

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-06 IO-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8726

INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

USLO PEKING

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

CINCPAC

ZEN AMCONSUL BOMBAY VIA POUCH

ZEN AMCONSUL CALCUTTA VIA POUCH

ZEN AMCONSUL MADRAS VIA POUCH

AMCONSUL HONTL KONG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 6554

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: IN, SK, PINS, PFOR

SUBJ: SIKKIM: AN HISTORIC PROCESS, BIG PROBLEMS REMAIN

SUMMARY--SIKKIM OFFICIALLY BECAME THE TWENTY-SECOND STATE
OF INDIA ON MAY 16 WITH THE DECLARATION OF PRESIDENTIAL
ASSENT TO THE RATIFICATION OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT
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BY A MAJORITY OF THE INDIAN STATES. THE INDIAN CHIEF

EXECUTIVE IN GAGTOK HAS BEEN NAMED THE STATE'S FIRST GOVERNOR AND THE INSTITUTION OF CHOGYAL STANDS ABOLISHED. INDIA'S CURRENT LEADERS , HAVING SOUGHT TO TIE SIKKIM'S FUTURE EXPRESSLY TO INDIA IN RECENT YEARS - ARE MANIFESTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISSOLUTION OF SIKKIM'S "PROTECTORATE" STATUS, BUT THIS DEVELOPMENT ALSO HAS TO BE SEEN AS THE CULMINATION OF A CENTURY-LONG HISTORICAL PROCESS. WHILE THE CHOGYAL PROBLEM HAS NOW APPARENTLY BEEN RESOLVED, OTHER PROBLEMS LIE IN WAIT. END SUMMARY.

1. PRESIDENT FAKHRUDDIN ALI AHMED GAVE HIS FORMAL ASSENT MAY 16 TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT MAKING SIKKIM THE TWENTY-SECOND STATE OF THE INDIAN UNION. MORE THAN HALF OF THE INDIAN STATES' LEGISLATURES HAD PREVIOUSLY RATIFIED THE AMENDMENT IN ACCORD WITH THE INDIAN CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENT. ON THE SAME DAY THE CURRENT CHIEF EXECUTIVE IN GANGTOK, B.B. LAL, WAS SWORN IN AS THE NEW STATE'S FIRST GOVERNOR. TO GIVE FULL EFFECT TO SIKKIM'S NEW STATUS, THE GOI HAS ALSO ABOLISHED THE POST OF THE POLITICAL OFFICER IN GANGTOK AND TRANSFERRED CENTRAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR SIKKIMESE AFFAIRS FROM THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS TO THE HOME MINISTRY. THE INSTITUTION OF THE CHOGYAL IS ABOLISHED BUT THE QUESTION OF WHERE THE FORMER CHOGYAL WILL RESIDE AND WHAT WILL BE DONE WITH THE PROPERTIES HELD IN HIS NAME REMAIN TO BE ADDRESSED BY THE NEW SIKKIM STATE ADMINISTRATION AND BY THE FORMER CHOGYAL HIMSELF.

2. SIKKIM'S INCORPORATION INTO THE INDIAN UNION CONCLUDES A CENTURY-LONG HISTORICAL PROCESS BY WHICH THE TINY PRINCELY STATE WAS REDUCED TO THE CONTROL OF THE DOMINANT POWER TO THE SOUTH. ALTHOUGH INDIA'S CURRENT LEADERS BEAR THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FULL ABSORPTION OF SIKKIM INTO THE INDIAN UNION AND THE FORMAL LOSS OF ITS SEPARATE "PROTECTORATE" IDENTITY, THERE HAS BEEN A CERTAIN GEOGRAPHIC INEVITABILITY TO THE WHOLE PROCESS: BECAUSE THE TRADITIONAL TRADE ROUTE FROM INDIA TO TIBET RAN THROUGH SIKKIM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY (NOT THROUGH BHUTAN) AND THE BRITISH WISHED TO ENCOURAGE TRADE WITH TIBET, IT WAS FELT THAT THE AREA HAD TO BE BROUGHT UNDER SOME

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CONTROL. A CENTURY LATER INDIA'S LEADERS - FEARING THAT THIS SAME TRADE ROUTE MIGHT SERVE AS A CHINESE INVASION ROUTE - CLAMPED THIS CONTROL STILL TIGHTER. THE PRESSURE EXERTED FROM THE SOUTH FLUCTUATED FROM DECADE TO DECADE DEPENDING ON A VARIETY OF FACTORS, BUT ESSENTIALLY ON THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE LOCAL RULER WAS ABLE TO MAINTAIN ORDER AND THE EXTENT OF THE DANGER TO THE AREA'S SECURITY FROM EXTERNAL FORCES, AS PERCEIVED BY THE BRITISH AND -

LATER - INDIANS. HISTORICALLY SIKKIM'S SLIDE INTO TOTAL SUBORDINATION TO INDIA PROBABLY BEGAN WITH THE BRITISH DECISION TO POST A RESIDENT OFFICER IN GANGTOK IN 1889 AFTER A SERIES OF TIBETAN DEPREDATIONS IN THE AREA. AS THE OXFORD HISTORY OF INDIA STATES (IN TREATING THE AMIR OF AFGHANISTAN'S REFUSAL TO ACCEPT SUCH A RESIDENT IN 1877), "IT WAS THE GENERAL BELIEF IN THE EAST THAT THE ADVENT OF A BRITISH RESIDENT AT A DURBAR COMMONLY FORESHADOWED THE END OF ITS INDEPENDENCE." INTERESTINGLY NO BRITISH RESIDENT WAS EVER POSTED IN MORE ISOLATED BHUTAN, WHICH UNLIKE SIKKIM HAS LARGELY RETAINED ITS INDEPENDENCE.

3. POST-COLONIAL INDIA APPEARED SATISFIED WITH SIKKIM'S STATUS AS A "PROTECTORATE", WITH UNCONTESTED INDIAN CONTROL OF ITS EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE AND BROAD POWERS TO INTERVENE IN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS RELATING TO SECURITY, UNTIL THE ERUPTION OF THE SINO-INDIAN CONFLICT IN THE EARLY 1950'S. SINCE THE GOI COULD TAKE WHATEVER STEPS IT DEEMED APPROPRIATE FOR INDIAN SECURITY IN THE REGION, SIKKIM'S STATUS AS A "PROTECTORATE" DID NOT POSE AN IMMEDIATE PROBLEM. BUT THE CLASH WITH CHINA HAD THE EFFECT OF INJECTING A STRONG DOSE OF REALPOLITIK IN INDIA'S POLICIES. IT ALSO FOCUSED DELHI'S ATTENTION ON THE ANOMALIES AND THE AMBIGUITIES WHICH EXISTED IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE HIMALAYAN STATES: THUS THE GOI PONDERED THE FACT THAT BECAUSE OF NEHRU'S SENTIMENTAL ATTACHMENT TO THE BRITISH MODUS OPERANDI IN THE HIMALAYAS, THE 1950 TREATY BETWEEN THE GOI AND THE CHOGYAL'S FATHER HAD LEFT SIKKIM A SUBSTANTIAL AREA OF AUTONOMY OVER ITS INTERNAL AFFAIRS, AND LEFT WHOLLY UNDEFINED THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF SIKKIM'S DEVELOPMENT. IN A SOCIETY LESS PREOCCUPIED WITH LEGAL FORMS AND MORE CONFIDENT OF ITS OWN FUTURE, SUCH LAGUAGE MIGHT HAVE BEEN IGNORED. BUT WITH CONFIDENTIAL

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THE CHOGYAL DEMONSTRATING AN INTEREST IN INDEPENDENCE AND

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 NEW DELHI 6554

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SEEMING TO WANT TO FOLLOW THE BHUTANESE MODEL IN
BREAKING OUT OF ISOLATION, WITH THE OUTBREAK OF ULTRA-
LEFTIST VIOLENCE IN WEST BENGAL, WITH THE POLITICIZATION
OF THE NEPALESE MAJORITY IN SIKKIM, AND A PALPABLE INCREASE
IN NEPALESE NATIONALISM ON ITS PERIPHERY, THE FEELING THAT
SIKKIM'S STATUS SHOULD BE FORMALLY REDEFINED, AND HER FUTURE
COMMITMENT TO INDIA MADE EXPRESS, GAINED SUPPORT THROUGH
THE 1950'S AND SOON BECAME A GOI OBJECTIVE, EVEN IF NEVER
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FORMALLY ANNOUNCED AS SUCH.

4. THE GOI INITIALLY SOUGHT TO ACHIEVE ITS OBJECTIVE THROUGH
SECRET BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE CHOGYAL. (NEW DELHI
POLNOTE MARCH 11, 1975 NOTAL). IN 1971/72, AFTER THE
ADMISSION OF THE PRC AND BHUTAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS, THE
GOI QUIETLY PROPOSED TO THE RULER THAT THE LANGUAGE IN THE
1950 TREATY DECLARING SIKKIM A PROTECTORATE BE REPLACED BY

THE PROVISION "SIKKIM SHALL BE IN PERMANENT ASSOCIATION WITH INDIA..." THE CHOGYAL BALKED, HOWEVER, AND NEGOTIATIONS SOON BROKE DOWN. BUT IN 1973 ANTI-CHOGYAL PROTESTS (TOLERATED IF NOT NURTURED BY THE GOI) ERUPTED IN GANGTOK, AND THE STAGE WAS SET FOR THE CHOGYAL'S ENEMIES, BOTH WITHIN AND WITHOUT SIKKIM TO RECAST SIKKIM AS AN ASSOCIATE STATE. AS SOON BECAME EMBARRASSINGLY CLEAR TO THE GOI, A CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL MUDDLE RESULTED. WHEN A FURTHER BREAKDOWN IN PUBLIC ORDER THREATENED IN EARLY 1975, THE GOI TOOK UNCHARACTERISTICALLY DECISIVE ACTION TO TRANSFORM SIKKIM INTO A FULL-FLEDGED-INDIAN STATE.

5. IN LEGISLATING SIKKIM'S FULL STATEHOOD, THE GOI HAS ANTICIPATED THE POSSIBILITY OF FUTURE EMERGENCIES IN THE REGION BY VESTING THE CENTRALLY-APPOINTED GOVERNOR WITH EXPANDED POWERS (NEW DELHI 5359 NOTAL). AT THIS POINT NEW DELHI APPEARS DETERMINED NOT TO LET MATTERS SLIP OUT OF CONTROL AGAIN. IF PROBLEMS DO ARISE, THEY WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY RELATE TO THE GROWING ASSERTIVENESS OF SIKKIM'S NEPALESE MAJORITY, FOR LONG DOMINATED BY THE LEPCHA/BHUTIA COMMUNITY OF WHICH THE CHOGYAL AND PRESENT PRIME MINISTER, KAZIL LHENDUP DORJI, HAVE BEEN THE MOST CONSPICUOUS EXAMPLES. OUR CONSULATE IN CALCUTTA HAS NOTED A GROWING ANTI-INDIAN FEELING AMONG THE NEPALESE COMMUNITIES IN SIKKIM, SOUTHERN BHUTAN AND NORTHERN WEST BENGAL (ESPECIALLY AT DARJEELING, THE GORKHA LEAGUE HEADQUARTERS) AND A TENDENCY FOR TRANS-BORDER COOPERATION AMONG ACTIVISTS FROM THESE COMMUNITIES. NOW THAT THE COMMON ENEMY THE CHOGYAL HAS BEEN DEPOSED, THE NEPALESE ON ONE HAND AND THE AGED KAZI AND HIS INDIAN PROTECTORS ON THE OTHER MAY INCREASINGLY DRAW APART. THE YOUNG NEPALESE POLITICIANS IN SIKKIM, AND ESPECIALLY THE YOUTHFUL FIREBRANDS WHO DOMINATE THE SCENE BELOW THE KAZI, AND WHO HAVE LINKS WITH

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INDIA'S COMMUNIST PARTY (MARXIST), ARE ALREADY COMPLAINING ABOUT THE SPECIAL POWERS GRANTED THE GOVERNOR, POWERS WHICH WOULD PREVENT THEM FROM CARRYING OUT EXTENSIVE LAND REFORMS AT THE EXPENSE OF THE BHUTIA/LEPCHA COMMUNITY, AND FROM OTHERWISE ADVANCING THEIR OWN COMMUNAL AND ULTIMATELY PAN-NEPALESE INTERESTS. THE INDIANS WHILE RESOLVING THEIR CHOGYAL PROBLEM, MAY THUS HAVE SET THE SCENE FOR EVEN MORE POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES IN THE FUTURE.

6. ALTHOUGH SIKKIM'S FULL ABSORPTION INTO INDIA APPARENTLY MARKS THE END OF A LONG HISTORICAL PROCESS, THE GOI SEEMS PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE FACT THAT THE ISSUE AS SUCH WILL NOT SOON DISAPPEAR. THE PRC HAS LOUDLY PROCLAIMED THAT IT DOES NOT RECOGNIZE THE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS, ALTHOUGH WHETHER THIS MEANS THAT THE PRC STILL CONSIDERS SIKKIM

AN INDIAN PROTECTORATE OR REJECTS EVEN THAT DESCRIPTION
AS SMACKING OF COLONIALISM UNCLEAR. WHILE THE CHINESE
AND THE PAKISTANIS MAY CONTINUE TO MAKE REFERENCE TO SIKKIM
AS THE ISSUE SUITS THEIR INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PROPAGANDA
REQUIREMENTS, THIS SHOULD NOT SURPRISE NOR UNDULY
UPSET THE GOI, ALTHOUGH IT MAY FEEL OBLIGED TO RESPOND
IN KIND ON OCCASION. INDIA'S OTHER NEIGHBORS ARE
EXPECTED BY THE GOI TO BEHAVE MORE DISCREETLY. THUS
THE GOI PROBABLY FEELS IT CAN TOLERATE SOME SNIPING BY
THE NEPALESE NEWSPAPERS AND OFFICIALS IN PRIVATE BUT IT
WON'T HESITATE TO COMPLAIN IF IT SUSPECTS OFFICIAL
SPONSORSHIP OR INDULGENCE OF MORE SYSTEMATIC ANTI-INDIAN
CAMPAIGNING ON THIS ISSUE. THE GOI MAY NOW BE AWAITING HOW
THE MOSCOW REPORTS THE LATEST DEVELOPMENT (MOSCOW 5598
NOTAL). PRAVDA POSITIVELY AND PROMPTLY REPORTED
SIKKIM'S CONVERSION INTO AN ASSOCIATE STATE; WE UNDER-
STAND IT HAS REMAINED SILENT SO FAR ON SIKKIM'S STATEHOOD,
ALTHOUGH MOSCOW SHOULD BE PLEASED WITH THE EMERGENCE OF
YET ANOTHER CONTENTIOUS, SEEMINGLY IRRESOLVABLE ISSUE
IN SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS.
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